

the RULE

BREAKERS

DON'T WASTE TIME NAVIGATING THE UNWRITTEN "RULES" OF YOUR PROFESSION. WHEN IT COMES TO GETTING AHEAD, POWERFUL LAWYER MOMS SAY THE BEST WAY TO SUCCEED IS TO FORGE YOUR OWN PATH.

BY KATHERINE REYNOLDS LEWIS

ISTOCKPHOTO

Ask any lawyer—the first years (maybe all years?) of your career are beyond grueling. Long hours, demanding clients, even more demanding bosses.

The sense of “If I just work a little harder, a little longer, a little smarter, I’ll get everything done—and *then* I’ll get promoted.”

That’s the bargain, right?

Kit Chaskin, a partner at the Chicago office of law firm Reed Smith, doesn’t buy it. Nor should you, no matter your field. When her kids were little (Hannah’s now 24 and Nicholas is 21), Kit opted to craft her own longer path to partnership, spending 10 years as an associate and another four as counsel. In the hard-charging world of law firms, where partnership power is typically earned after seven to ten years, Kit’s choice to move at her own pace wasn’t always the easy one. “There were the days when I saw the guys I started with making partner and I knew I was smarter and better,” she says now. “But I didn’t mind that because I got to see my family. I was a soccer coach.”

We women too often bind ourselves to certain unwritten work “rules” that keep us from achieving what we want at work and at home, says Kit, who also serves as global director of Reed Smith’s women’s initiative network. Rules like “stick to the schedule,” “be perfect” and “avoid career detours.” Kit adds, “The most toxic and hidden rules are the ones that we make up in our own heads. What these rules really do is keep us in the weeds. They keep us from being strategic.”

What are the unwritten rules?

We asked lawyer moms from the Working Mother & Flex-Time Lawyers Best Law Firms for Women to break down the top six that hold women back—and tell us how they broke free of them. Here’s what they shared.

Rule 1: Stick to the Schedule

More than a few colleagues thought Stasia Kelly was crazy when she got pregnant while up for partnership at Wilmer Cutler (now WilmerHale).

“That was clearly a risk, but for me it was well worth taking,” says Stasia, who had experienced difficulty conceiving and whose twin sons, Mike and Brian, are now 25.

The idea that life’s big events should happen in a particular order didn’t make sense to Stasia, now co-managing partner of DLA Piper, a Baltimore-based law firm. “You’ve got to look at yourself in the mirror and figure out what’s best for you and your family,” she says. “And that should lead you to certain decisions and certain risk-taking along the way.”



Indeed, stay alert for can’t-miss work opportunities. Kit didn’t hesitate to rearrange her family’s schedule to fit around big career moves, like when she spent time at a client’s London office when her kids were 5 and 7. “I told my family, ‘Pretend I’m a captain of a ship and it’s leaving the harbor and will return in three weeks,’” Kit says. “I threw myself into it and the family was totally fine.”

Rule 2: Avoid Career Detours

Life gets busy, so it’s no wonder you’re tempted to pass on activities that seem more likely to distract from than contribute to career goals. But don’t say no just yet. “To have something

you’re truly passionate about that’s a little bit different from your practice is very energizing,” says Lisa A. Linsky, a partner at McDermott Will & Emery in New York City who has a 17-year-old daughter, MacKenzie. “By making time for other things, you actually make yourself more effective in all areas.”

For Lisa, that opportunity arrived in 2006 when a partner at her firm “volunteered” her to start a program for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender employees. Lisa at first worried the extra work might undermine her career goals, but she soon embraced the project. In the end, she built an LGBT program that helped McDermott win a 100 percent score on the Human Rights Campaign’s Corporate Equality Index for eight consecutive years.

The program also helped Lisa’s career, prompting calls from current and potential clients seeking to create a more welcoming environment for LGBT employees in their own organizations. For example, Lisa met the chief legal officer of a large financial institution at a conference and ended up helping his staff create an award-winning LGBT program of its own. “What better way to build and groom and enhance client relationships?” she points out.

Rule 3: Act Like a Guy

Like many professions, the legal sector can be aggressive and tough. But what if macho is not your style?

Develop an approach that works for you, says Linda K. Myers, who has built a career crafting debt-financing deals in private equity, a male-dominated field where machismo goes a long way. Even in the most heated, drawn-out negotiations, Linda has opted for her own style, choosing dresses and sweaters rather than power suits. She also prides herself on her manners, making it a point to say thank you when the other side accedes to her demands for concessions or compromises.

“I kept it polite but I was also persistent and firm,” says Linda, now a partner and member of the executive committee at Chicago-based law firm Kirkland & Ellis and mom of Megan,

24%

OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS AT THE BEST LAW FIRMS ARE WOMEN.

16, Ryan, 14, and Brendan, 12. “It worked. I think that level of civility, even when I was trying to take things from them, was refreshing.”

That’s not to say women can’t be aggressive, but don’t get hung up on seeming tough if that’s not the right fit for you.

Rule 4: Wait Your Turn

Think your firm’s leadership will wake up and realize today’s the day to promote you? Keep dreaming.

“Don’t let your career just happen to you,” says Laurin Blumenthal Kleiman, global co-head of the investment management practice at Chicago-based Sidley Austin and mom of daughter Daryl, 28, and sons Charlie, 23, and Gabe, 19. Look for ways to distinguish yourself—for instance, writing an article with a partner you’d like to work with. “You can’t ever really just sit back and take what’s given to you,” says Laurin, who established herself as an expert on hedge fund and private equity fund manager regulation just as regulators were about to clamp down on that industry. “You have to keep your eyes open for opportunities.”

Pretty much every successful partner can tell of early risks taken and opportunities achieved. For Susan Kohlmann, a partner at Jenner & Block, a Chicago-based law firm, that day came when a circuit court

argument in a pro bono prisoner case was scheduled when the senior associate was busy with other matters. Susan offered to take responsibility even though she had no experience arguing such cases at that point. “I said, ‘Yes, I can do that, no problem,’” says the mom of Willie, 28, Ben, 24, and Jake, 20. “Once I did it and argued the case, people looked at me as someone perfectly willing and able to stand up in court.”

Beyond seizing an opportunity when it presents itself, consider what it might take to make an opportunity appear. Of course, not every risk matters, but think strategically about the kind of experience you need and the influential people you need to know, and make the leap that can take you where you want to go.

Rule 5: Always Be Networking

As in most professions, the path to law partnership requires lawyers to raise their profile by writing articles, sitting on committees, joining industry groups and speaking at events. For a working mom, making an always-on commitment to networking can seem daunting, if not impossible, prompting you to either give up altogether or take a scattershot approach.

But there’s another way to consider that’s less time-consuming, suggests Reed Smith’s Kit Chaskin. “Networking with strangers has a very low return on investment in terms of time spent and business gotten,” she says. Instead, spend money on a business development coach and “come up with a strategy for making connections that works for your schedule—a long-term strategy so you can see the little investments you’re making and the payoff.”

Patricia K. Gillette, a partner at Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe in San Francisco, served on the board at her sons’ school, which happened to include many well-connected individuals. “I was able to combine something that was of paramount importance to my kids with something that would benefit my job as well: hobnobbing with these people,” says Patricia, whose sons are now 32 and 28. Not only did she find clients among her community and friend

relationships, she made friends with her clients by inviting them to cook or hike with her, two of her favorite hobbies. “I’m not a rule follower and never have been,” adds Patricia. “And I credit my success to that.”

Rule 6: Be Perfect

All the rules—written and unwritten—reinforce the idea that women lawyers (particularly those who are parents) can’t progress in their careers unless they scrupulously avoid every mistake along their path. You might think your boss won’t tolerate even one typo in an early draft of a brief, but focusing solely on that one fear will distract you from the big picture, says Kit: “Then I’m all concerned about looking for typos instead of thinking strategically about whether this memo is going to help our cause.”

Lisa Linsky agrees with her: “This notion of being all things to all people, all the time, is very destructive and counterproductive.” Kit and Lisa and all the other high-level attorney moms who spoke to us emphasize that they do not strive for perfection but instead keep their sights on the big picture—a happy family, a fulfilling career, rewarding outside projects and a healthy dose of confidence. This recipe can work for you, too, so don’t be afraid to bend or even break the rules in order to stand out as a strategic and creative thinker. ■

10%

OF LAWYERS AT THE BEST LAW FIRMS WORK REDUCED HOURS.



50 BEST LAW FIRMS for WOMEN 2014

Baker & McKenzie

Chicago, IL

EQUITY PARTNERS 18% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 34% REDUCED HOURS 8%

Talented attorneys thrive at this firm, which provides female partners with access to customized coaching, global leadership training and a major women's initiative. Moms may take advantage of 18 fully paid weeks of maternity leave, scheduling flex and \$10,000 in adoption assistance.

Chapman and Cutler

Chicago, IL

EQUITY PARTNERS 19% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 28% REDUCED HOURS 5%

This firm made big changes in January, replacing its strict billable-hours tracks with "flexible hours expectations" that more directly emphasize professional development. Associates stay energized with free concierge services, wellness fairs, on-site yoga classes and fresh fruit deliveries.

Cooley

Palo Alto, CA

EQUITY PARTNERS 22% NONEQUITY PARTNERS N/A REDUCED HOURS 9%

Women appreciate this firm's alternative work options, subsidized backup care and generous parental leaves. Those looking to on- and off-ramp are connected to colleagues who have done so. If they do take extended breaks, they may be able to return via a one-year training program.

Crowell & Moring

Washington, DC

EQUITY PARTNERS 13% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 33% REDUCED HOURS 16%

Solid mentoring and sponsorship programs draw many people to this firm. In 2013, 53% of all incoming associates were female; some will eventually pursue leadership roles in the Women Attorneys Network (which holds 30+ events annually).

Davis Wright Tremaine

Seattle, WA

EQUITY PARTNERS 20% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 29% REDUCED HOURS 7%

Opportunity knocks for women at this firm, where they're 60% of new equity partners. Special business development initiatives propel rising attorneys, and remote and reduced-hours work does not preclude promotion. Subsidized family backup care debuted in 2013.

Debevoise & Plimpton

New York, NY

EQUITY PARTNERS 18% NONEQUITY PARTNERS N/A REDUCED HOURS 10%

To create formidable female leaders, management here regularly reviews the professional needs of high-potential associates and works with practice group heads to arrange key assignments. Tech stipends boost flexibility. Reduced-hours lawyers have been making partner since 1994.

DLA Piper

Baltimore, MD

EQUITY PARTNERS 18% NONEQUITY PARTNERS N/A REDUCED HOURS 11%

While 10% of lawyers here officially use flexible schedules, there's an additional option (recently introduced) that allows people to phase back to work for three months after a long leave. That's good news, since the firm just upped paid parental leave from 90 days to 18 weeks.

Dorsey & Whitney

Minneapolis, MN

EQUITY PARTNERS 18% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 24% REDUCED HOURS 11%

Under the direction of this firm's management committee, a new pilot program helps female partners develop executive presence and enhance their leadership and rain-making skills. Women head three offices and six practice groups here; junior female attorneys are guided by senior mentors.

Drinker Biddle & Reath

Philadelphia, PA

EQUITY PARTNERS 18% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 21% REDUCED HOURS 8%

Working from home and other off-site locations is supported by this firm, which makes it easier for attorneys by dispensing remote access passwords and 24/7 IT aid. Steady progress continues for women: In February, they were 50% of the nonequity partners earning equity roles.

Duane Morris

Philadelphia, PA

EQUITY PARTNERS 12% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 26% REDUCED HOURS 13%

The Women's Initiative here is a powerhouse, educating attorneys about industry trends, staging work life discussions, proferring mentors, running retreats and hosting a yearlong leadership program. Through Project X-Factor, members make connections with potential Fortune 500 clients.

Faegre Baker Daniels

Global

EQUITY PARTNERS 21% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 33% REDUCED HOURS 9%

Great benefits make this firm a standout, among them up to 16 weeks of fully paid maternity leave, adoption aid (\$5,000 per child) and subsidized backup care. While 11% of attorneys formally reduce or adjust their schedules, everyone has the flexibility to work remotely when needed.

Farella Braun + Martel

San Francisco, CA

EQUITY PARTNERS 18% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 53% REDUCED HOURS 25%

Female attorneys here upgrade their business development skills by working closely with experienced partners, consultants and members of the Women's Leadership Committee. A new cross-marketing series generates clients and contacts. Mothers share an affinity group.

EQUITY PARTNERS = Equity partners who are women NONEQUITY PARTNERS = Nonequity partners who are women REDUCED HOURS = Lawyers working reduced hours

Finnegan, Henderson, Farabow, Garrett & Dunner

Washington, DC

EQUITY PARTNERS 19% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 31% REDUCED HOURS 11%

A slower route is A-OK at this firm, where an attenuated partner track allows associates to cut their hours by 40% if they choose. The Women's Forum grants insight into leadership, pro bono work and personal balance. Office perks include child care.

Foley & Lardner

Milwaukee, WI

EQUITY PARTNERS 14% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 19% REDUCED HOURS 6%

Moms cheered when this firm recently boosted paid maternity leave from 12 to 18 weeks and upped adoption leave from 4 to 10. Reduced schedules are also available—since 2009, 47% of female equity partners have earned their positions while using one.

Frankfurt Kurnit Klein & Selz

New York, NY

EQUITY PARTNERS 38% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 25% REDUCED HOURS 10%

With its wide range of inspiring speakers and events, this firm gets women talking about ambition, self-belief and overcoming barriers. At present, 50% of attorneys and 43% of practice group leaders here are female; they can utilize flex schedules, tech stipends, sabbaticals and backup care.

Fredrikson & Byron

Minneapolis, MN

EQUITY PARTNERS 33% NONEQUITY PARTNERS N/A REDUCED HOURS 31%

The board of directors at this firm increases the visibility of female attorneys by placing them on key committees and in other major roles. To expand their reach, up-and-comers may join the internal women's network or mothers' group. Anyone working 80% time retains partnership eligibility.

Gibbons

Newark, NJ

EQUITY PARTNERS 15% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 24% REDUCED HOURS 8%

After a birth or adoption, attorneys here may cut their hours by 40% for a year (then by 20% for as long as they like) with no effect on promotion. Mobile tech facilitates remote work. Emergency child care is subsidized at 88%. A leadership academy and business plan workshops inspire women.



Hogan Lovells US

Washington, DC

EQUITY PARTNERS 18% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 33% REDUCED HOURS 7%

Backed by its women's initiative and six diversity councils, this firm has been intensifying its sponsorship, training and development of female attorneys, recently launching the Lead & Succeed program, which prepares them for high-profile roles. Flex options appeal to associates.

Holland & Hart

Denver, CO

EQUITY PARTNERS 28% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 7% REDUCED HOURS 17%

When Elizabeth Sharrer became chair of this firm in January, it tipped the balance of the management committee, increasing female membership from 40% to 60%. Mentoring and retreats await members of the in-house Women's Forum. Reduced hours and sabbaticals are available.

Hunton & Williams

Washington, DC

EQUITY PARTNERS 18% NONEQUITY PARTNERS N/A REDUCED HOURS 15%

Customized schedules allow attorneys here to scale back their hours, telecommute, work on a project-to-project basis or even (in the Pathways to Success program) take up to five years off. The firm's leaders promote proactive sponsorship and practice planning; mentoring options abound.

Ice Miller

Indianapolis, IN

EQUITY PARTNERS 24% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 23% REDUCED HOURS 10%

Female equity partners chair 75% of the committees at this firm (hiring, diversity and inclusion, professional development) that affect the career growth of female associates and counsel. Leadership programs, formal mentors and alternative-hours arrangements help attorneys succeed.

Jenner & Block

Chicago, IL

EQUITY PARTNERS 15% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 31% REDUCED HOURS 6%

Now marking its 100th anniversary, this firm clearly supports the advancement of women: In 2013, its female leaders included managing partner Susan Levy and the COO, CFO, CTO and CMO. New business development workshops and a women's forum engage partners.

Godfrey & Kahn

Milwaukee, WI

EQUITY PARTNERS 18% NONEQUITY PARTNERS N/A REDUCED HOURS 6%

Lawyers here can flex and reduce their hours or telecommute; at regular intervals, they speak with advisors and practice group leaders about how these arrangements are working. New moms get 12 paid weeks off and may "ramp up" for a month when returning to work.

Goodwin Procter

Boston, MA

EQUITY PARTNERS 14% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 30% REDUCED HOURS 7%

Through its Owning Your Success advanced leadership program, this firm helps aspiring female equity partners to manage teams, obtain sponsors and build a brand. Attorneys may take 18 paid weeks off to adopt or give birth—and can access transition coaching for new moms.

Hanson Bridgett

San Francisco, CA

EQUITY PARTNERS 28% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 28% REDUCED HOURS 25%

Dedicated leadership courses motivate female attorneys at this firm. A development manager ensures those with reduced schedules still get great assignments. Mothers bond at parenting lunches, take on-site yoga classes and use emergency dependent care (new this year).

EQUITY PARTNERS = Equity partners who are women NONEQUITY PARTNERS = Nonequity partners who are women REDUCED HOURS = Lawyers working reduced hours

Katten Muchin Rosenman

Chicago, IL

EQUITY PARTNERS 17% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 31% REDUCED HOURS 9%

Expectant moms who work here can take up to six months off after giving birth (with their billable-hours targets adjusted accordingly). The firm's Work Life/Development Task Force carefully evaluates its flex programs, leave policies and training, upgrading wherever needed.

Kirkland & Ellis

Chicago, IL

EQUITY PARTNERS 14% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 31% REDUCED HOURS 3%

The quality of attorneys' work matters more than where it gets done, this firm believes. With that in mind, management revised its flexible scheduling policy in 2013, outlining all available alternative work options and addressing the needs of parents returning from leave.

Latham & Watkins

Global

EQUITY PARTNERS 17% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 36% REDUCED HOURS 5%

Formal mentors, training programs and business initiatives for women help attorneys here expand their horizons. Mothers-to-be earn 18 fully paid weeks off. Top moms include vice chair Ora Fisher and office managing partners Karen Silverman and Michele Johnson.

Lindquist & Vennum

Minneapolis, MN

EQUITY PARTNERS 22% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 39% REDUCED HOURS 12%

Telecommuting is common at this firm, and anyone who puts in at least 25 hours per week is eligible to receive full benefits. To further satisfy attorneys' work life needs, management is thoroughly reviewing flex policies and practices. Women were 44% of new hires in 2013.

Littler

San Francisco, CA

EQUITY PARTNERS 28% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 49% REDUCED HOURS 13%

Women chair this firm's board of directors, comprise 30% of the management committee and head 14 practice groups and 13 offices. Influential partners advocate for diverse, high-performing associates. Participants in the Flex-Time Attorneys program work off-site and can choose their hours.

“Achieving a critical mass of women in top law firm roles will require that women take strategic risks and also that firms reconsider how compensation is assessed, promotion decisions are made, business development credit is awarded, clients are billed and leadership positions are filled.”

—Deborah Epstein Henry, founder and president of Flex-Time Lawyers LLC

Lowenstein Sandler

Roseland, NJ

EQUITY PARTNERS 17% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 15% REDUCED HOURS 4%

Thanks to this firm's permissive flex and time-off policies, attorneys here are able to take a real break when they need it. Importantly, promotions are based on their overall contributions, not just their rain-making efforts. For parents and elder caregivers, subsidized backup care offers relief.

Manatt, Phelps & Phillips

Los Angeles, CA

EQUITY PARTNERS 17% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 28% REDUCED HOURS 8%

Coaches and mentors guide female associates as they develop business here, showing them how to obtain and retain clients. More than 30 networking events provided entree to industry titans in 2013. Talks by respected critical thinkers enlighten members of the women's initiative.

McDermott Will & Emery

Chicago, IL

EQUITY PARTNERS 18% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 37% REDUCED HOURS 6%

The future looks bright for women at this firm. In 2013, they earned 29% of all equity partner promotions (up from 13% in 2012); among those women promoted, 38% worked reduced hours. As their careers go forward, many take part in dedicated mentoring groups and coaching programs.

McGuireWoods

Richmond, VA

EQUITY PARTNERS 11% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 24% REDUCED HOURS 15%

Quarterly luncheons run by the Women Lawyers Network here help female attorneys advance, exploring firm financials, client relationships and the path to partnership. Paid maternity leave lasts 18 weeks; adoption aid, subsidized backup care and flex schedules also support parents.

Morrison & Foerster

San Francisco, CA

EQUITY PARTNERS 17% NONEQUITY PARTNERS N/A REDUCED HOURS 18%

With annual retreats for female partners, a new 10-month business development series and 19 U.S. affinity groups, this firm has appeal. New mothers enjoy reduced hours and special mentoring and lactation programs; anyone who works 67% time can still become an equity partner.

Munger, Tolles & Olson

Los Angeles, CA

EQUITY PARTNERS 21% NONEQUITY PARTNERS N/A REDUCED HOURS 3%

Flexibility is so ingrained here that 90% of attorneys work remotely during the year, and there's a reduced schedule (with no minimum-hours requirement) on the partnership track. Paid parental leave stretches for four months. In 2013, 75% of new equity partners were moms.

Neal, Gerber & Eisenberg

Chicago, IL

EQUITY PARTNERS 14% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 33% REDUCED HOURS 15%

Coming together across all levels and practices, this firm's female attorneys gather in mixed teams each quarter to share goals and forge alliances. A formal counsel track (with fewer hours) presents an alternative to the partnership route. In 2013, 40% of women worked reduced schedules.

Norton Rose Fulbright

Houston, TX

EQUITY PARTNERS 20% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 45% REDUCED HOURS 7%

Born from a global merger in 2013, this firm boasts many prominent women, among them five U.S. practice heads and managing partner Linda Addison. Attorneys can access flexible, reduced or part-time schedules while nabbing top assignments and tracking toward partnership.

EQUITY PARTNERS = Equity partners who are women NONEQUITY PARTNERS = Nonequity partners who are women REDUCED HOURS = Lawyers working reduced hours

O'Melveny & Myers

New York, NY

EQUITY PARTNERS 12% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 50% REDUCED HOURS 6%

Targeted training helps female attorneys here develop clients and exert influence. Those seeking an unorthodox work arrangement may participate in the CustOMMize program, where they can job-share, work off-site, reduce their hours or take extended leaves.

Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe

New York, NY

EQUITY PARTNERS 19% NONEQUITY PARTNERS N/A REDUCED HOURS 9%

Making partner here doesn't have to mean following a rigid schedule. Increasingly, it's about utilizing custom career tracks and practicing day-to-day flexibility. Lawyers get unlimited time off for illness, vacation or personal reasons. Mentoring circles and affinity groups provide community.

Perkins Coie

Seattle, WA

EQUITY PARTNERS 15% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 38% REDUCED HOURS 14%

The Parents Affinity Group at this firm helps attorneys transition back to work post-baby and explains family benefits, leave policies, estate planning and more. Special business development sessions, all-female work retreats and gender-based assignment reviews aid women.

Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman

New York, NY

EQUITY PARTNERS 18% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 21% REDUCED HOURS 19%

With 12 parents on its board of directors, this firm is aware of what families need. It has made flexible work arrangements ubiquitous, while a new task force (initiated by mid-level associates) explores satisfaction with reduced-hours options.

Quarles & Brady

Milwaukee, WI

EQUITY PARTNERS 22% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 43% REDUCED HOURS 9%

New chair Kimberly Johnson tops this firm's list of accomplished female lawyers, which also includes 30% of its office managing partners. An in-house university offers training, mentoring and career planning, while a formal flex policy and backup care assist many families.



Reed Smith

Global

EQUITY PARTNERS 23% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 20% REDUCED HOURS 8%

In 2013, women were 36% of this firm's leaders (up from 31% in 2012) and 43% of its executive committee (up from 40%). To help more female associates and partners move into equity roles, two pilot programs provide them with sponsorship, training, coaching and business development grants.

Schiff Hardin

Chicago, IL

EQUITY PARTNERS 22% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 33% REDUCED HOURS 6%

Leaders here assess all client teams (as well as all pitches, proposals and presentations) to make sure that diverse attorneys are well represented. An affinity group and new leadership academy accelerate the rise of women. Paid parental leave was just increased to 18 weeks from 12.

Seyfarth Shaw

Chicago, IL

EQUITY PARTNERS 16% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 22% REDUCED HOURS 8%

To help its attorneys meet their personal responsibilities, this firm endorses alternative schedules, unlimited vacation days and a nonpartnership track. Work life liaisons at all sites provide guidance, and an upcoming program for new hires will address finding balance.

Shook, Hardy & Bacon

Kansas City, MO

EQUITY PARTNERS 24% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 35% REDUCED HOURS 7%

Women are 30% of the executive committee here. Firmwide retreats and thoughtful development activities (gender-specific leadership training, work life integration education, coaching for high-potential associates) help more female attorneys make partner.

Sidley Austin

Chicago, IL

EQUITY PARTNERS 21% NONEQUITY PARTNERS N/A REDUCED HOURS 7%

In 2013, this firm monitored women associates on reduced schedules to ensure they kept progressing toward partnership, stepped up lateral recruiting of female partners (and tracked their participation in business opportunities) and held 135+ key networking events.

Thompson & Knight

Dallas, TX

EQUITY PARTNERS 16% NONEQUITY PARTNERS 34% REDUCED HOURS 8%

Back in 1973, managing partner Emily Parker was the first female lawyer hired by this firm (where she now sponsors and mentors many others). Today, a dynamic women's initiative, progressive flex policies and great child care benefits attract top talent.

WilmerHale

Washington, DC

EQUITY PARTNERS 24% NONEQUITY PARTNERS N/A REDUCED HOURS 7%

Famed for its flexible career paths, this firm allows attorneys to take up to a year off to deal with a family medical crisis or welcome a new child (at least 12 weeks are fully paid). It also offers myriad work life balance programs, smart dependent care solutions and an active women's leadership initiative.

Methodology

The 2014 Working Mother & Flex-Time Lawyers 50 Best Law Firms for Women application includes more than 300 questions about workforce representation; time off and leaves; child care; flexibility; leadership, compensation and advancement of women; and development and retention of women. Profiles are culled from the applications and reflect 2013 data.

EQUITY PARTNERS = Equity partners who are women NONEQUITY PARTNERS = Nonequity partners who are women REDUCED HOURS = Lawyers working reduced hours